

Facts for Kids: Algonquian People (<http://www.native-languages.org/languages.htm>)

How do you pronounce "Algonquian?" What does it mean?

It's pronounced "al-GON-kee-un." It doesn't actually mean anything. Anthropologists invented this term to refer to tribes who spoke a related group of languages.

What is the right way to spell "Algonquian"?

It can be spelled either "Algonquian" or "Algonkian." Either spelling is correct.

Are the Algonquians extinct?

Certainly not! There are more than half a million Native American people today belonging to Algonquian tribes. But you may not be able to find online information about modern Algonquian people if you do a search for "Algonquian" -- because they rarely call themselves by this name. Try looking them up by their real tribal names. There are a few extinct Algonquian tribes, including the Beothuk and Wappinger tribes, but most Algonquian tribes still survive today.

Which tribes are Algonquian?

The many Algonquian tribes include the Abenakis, Algonquins, Arapahos, Attikameks, Blackfeet, Cheyennes, Crees, Gros Ventre, Illini, Kickapoo, Leni Lenape/Delawares, Lumbees (Croatan Indians), Mahicans (including Mohicans, Stockbridge Indians, and Wappingers), Maliseets, Menominees, Sac and Fox, Miamis, Métis/Michif, Mi'kmaq/Micmacs, Mohegans (including Pequots, Montauks, Niantics, and Shinnecocks), Montagnais/Innu, Munsees, Nanticokes, Narragansetts, Naskapis, Ojibways/Chippewas, Ottawas, Passamaquoddy, Penobscots, Potawatomis, Powhatans, Shawnees, Wampanoags (including the Massachusett, Natick, and Mashpee), Wiyot, and Yurok.

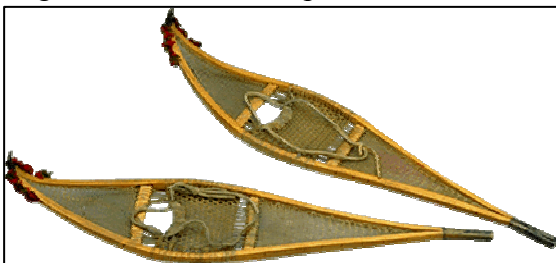
Where do the Algonquian Indians live?

Algonquian people live throughout the United States, from California to Maine, and throughout southern Canada, from Alberta to Labrador. On the right is a map showing the original homelands of various Algonquian peoples. Remember that some tribes were forced to move after the Europeans arrived--there are many eastern Algonquian people who live in Oklahoma now, for instance.



What is Algonquian culture like? What tools and weapons did they use in the past?

Each Algonquian tribe had different cultures and traditions. Most Algonquian Indians made birchbark or dugout canoes for transportation. Northern Algonkian tribes used snowshoes and dogsleds to travel in winter. On the left is a picture of Cree snowshoes. Hunters and warriors usually used bows and arrows, spears, and heavy wooden clubs. Algonkian Indian children had dolls and toys, such as a miniature bow and arrow or hand-held game. Most Algonquian mothers traditionally carried their babies in cradleboards on their backs--a custom many American parents have adopted.



How were Algonquian tribes governed in the past? How are they governed today?

Each tribe had its own form of government. Most Algonquian tribes had some form of tribal council. Some tribes' councils were made up of the leaders of each village, others were made up of the leaders of each clan (a large extended family), and still others were made up of warriors who had distinguished themselves as battle. In some tribes either men or women could be council members and chiefs, and in others only men could do this. It depended on each tribe's culture. Some tribes didn't have chiefs at all. Other tribes did not have councils and the ruler was more like a king than a chief.

What were Algonquian homes like?

In most Algonquian tribes, each band lived in a village of small round buildings called wigwams. On the right is a picture of a wigwam. Algonquian tribes on the Great Plains used tepees for shelter instead of wigwams. Some northeastern Algonquians built longhouses like the Iroquois. The California Algonquians lived in redwood-plank houses. Some Algonquian villages, particularly in the east, were permanent and had fortified walls around them. Other Algonquian tribes were semi-nomadic and moved their houses frequently.



What was Algonquian clothing like?

Traditional clothes, headdresses, and hairstyles were different in every tribe, and Algonquian Indians could tell each other's tribal identity from their style of dress. One article of clothing shared by all the Algonquian Indian tribes was moccasins. Algonquian men generally wore breechcloths with leather leggings, and Algonquian women wore skirts or dresses. In northern Algonquian tribes, Indians also wore a shirt, tunic, or mantle, but in southern tribes and in California, they went shirtless. In colonial times, many Algonquians adapted European fashions such as cloth blouses and jackets, decorating them with fancy beadwork. Today, members of most Algonquian tribes wear their traditional clothing only at ceremonial events such as powwows or a wedding.

What was Algonquian food like in the days before supermarkets?

Algonquian tribes in different climates ate different food. In New York state and south, most Algonquians were farming people, growing corn, beans, and squash. North of New York state, the Algonquians were primarily hunter-gatherers, with the men chasing big game like elk and moose and the women collecting vegetables and nuts. Western Algonkian tribes, like the Blackfoot, hunted the buffalo. Near the Great Lakes, Algonkian people cultivated wild rice. Most Algonkian Indians also hunted small game like turkeys and rabbits and fished in the rivers and ocean.

What are Algonquian arts and crafts like?

Each tribe has its own artistic tradition. One art form most of the eastern Algonquian tribes shared was crafting wampum out of white and purple shell beads to use as symbols of social status, currency, and commemoration of important events. Like European tapestries or Celtic tartans, the designs and pictures on wampum often told a story or represented family affiliations.

Questions

1. **What is not an example of an Algonquian tribe?**
 - a. Blackfeet
 - b. Narragansetts
 - c. Pueblos
 - d. Wampanoags

2. **What is an Algonquian custom that many American parents have adopted?**
 - a. Traveling in dugout canoes
 - b. Carrying their babies in cradleboards on their backs
 - c. Wearing breechcloths with leather leggings
 - d. Living in wigwams

3. **Today, most Algonquian tribes wear their traditional clothing...**
 - a. Only at ceremonial events
 - b. Only when they are in the presence of outsiders
 - c. Most of the time
 - d. Never

4. **What is the most common type of Algonquian home?**
 - a. Teepees
 - b. Longhouses
 - c. Wigwams
 - d. Redwood-plank houses

5. **In New York state, most Algonquians...**
 - a. Were hunter-gatherers
 - b. Were farmers
 - c. Lived in large city-states
 - d. Constantly fought one another

Pretend you were a member of an Algonquian tribe before Europeans arrived in the Americas. Use the information in the reading to describe what you think your life would be like. Remember that Algonquian tribes were not all the same – so make sure to focus your description on a single tribe or area of land where customs would likely be similar.
